



Community Action Investment Program Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Semi-Annual Report (November 10, 2002 – June 30, 2003)

Cooperative Agreement # 122-A-00-02-00017-00

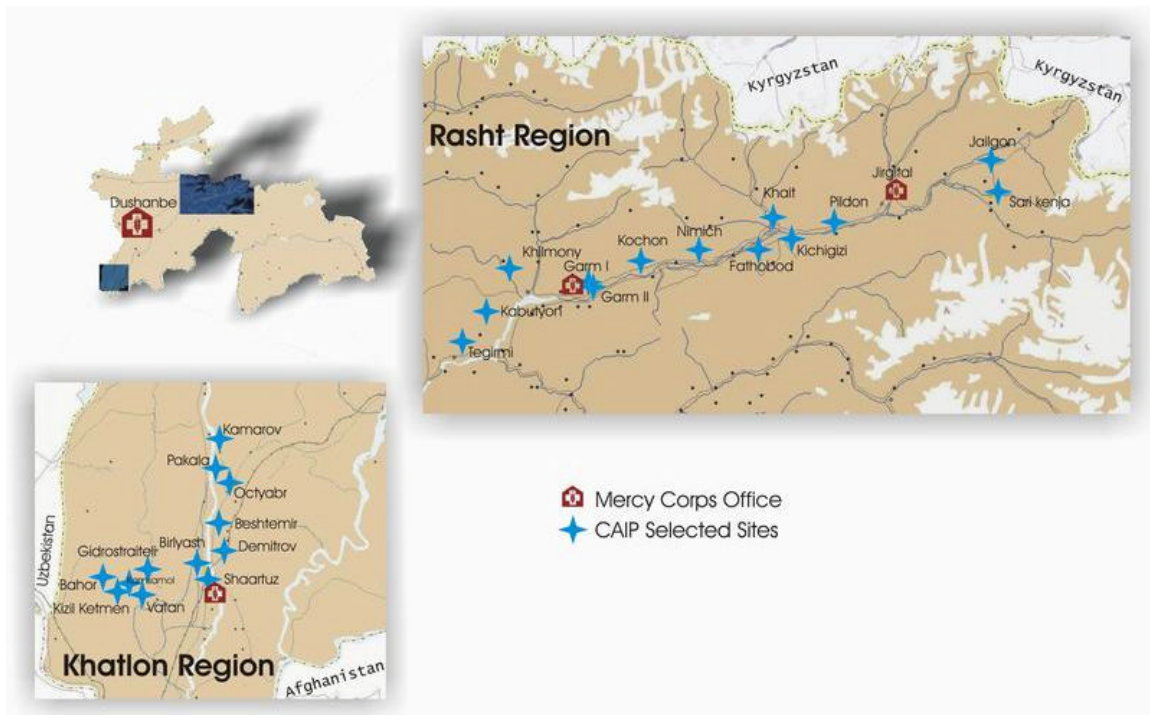


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Note: In June 2003, when Mercy Corps’ Cooperative Agreement with USAID was modified to grant a CAIP expansion, the reporting timeline was changed. Instead of semi-annual reports based on the start-date of our agreement, we will report quarterly, with quarters coinciding with fiscal quarters. The transition to the new reporting schedule means that this report covers a period of almost 8 months (November 10, 2002 – June 30, 2003). The next report will cover 3rd Qtr. 2003.

CAIP Communities in Tajikistan



CAIP Communities in Uzbekistan



Executive Summary

The Community Action Investment Program is a three-year Conflict Mitigation initiative, supported by USAID, and implemented in Central Asia since May 2002. CAIP strives to mitigate conflict in vulnerable regions of Central Asia by strengthening democratic and participatory processes within communities, providing community members the necessary tools to address sources of tension, which might otherwise lead to conflict. CAIP works together with communities to alleviate sources of tension directly by implementing projects to improve social services and to increase economic opportunities in those communities. Mercy Corps' CAIP Program Objective is to help prevent conflict by promoting broad-based citizen participation in targeted areas; resulting in improved standards of living, more active and engaged citizens, and more open, accountable local government.

Mercy Corps implements CAIP in four areas: the Ferghana Valley (Uzbekistan since the start of the program, and Kyrgyzstan, added in June 2003), the Rasht Valley and Khatlon region of Tajikistan, and the Lebap Velayat, Turkmenistan. During the first year of the project, Mercy Corps has worked in 49 communities in 3 countries in Central Asia. In June 2003, USAID expanded the scope of CAIP, allowing Mercy Corps to add additional communities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and to begin working in Kyrgyzstan.

As of June 30, 2003, Mercy Corps' CAIP attained the following goals:

- Established 49 democratically-elected Community Action Groups (one in each community), each with 8-12 members, an average of 25% of whom are women;
- Conducted consensus-building workshops and numerous public meetings in each community, transferring skills in participatory methods to over 500 CAG members, which many have replicated in their own community meetings without Mercy Corps guidance. Over 3000 community members have been introduced to participatory methods during such community meetings;
- Conducted experiential training exercises with all CAGs, building skills in needs assessment, project design, project management, financial management, procurement, transparency and accountability, reaching over 500 CAG members and numerous community members;
- Completed or currently executing 105 sustainable community infrastructure projects, directly benefiting 181,858 people;
- Completed over 40 social events, such as cooking competitions, Navruz celebrations, sports events, etc., involving approximately 700 people;
- Fostered an increased understanding between local government and community members, by involving mahalla leaders and other local government leaders on CAGs, and local government agency staff in infrastructure project review and implementation;
- Facilitated increased learning opportunities of CAG members and local government by including them in cross-visits to neighboring community projects;
- Conducted youth mentoring training for over 200 young people in CAIP communities, resulting in increased involvement of youth in CAGs, community projects, and other community activities;
- Provided short-term employment to 458 people on community infrastructure projects; and created 14 long-term jobs;

- Leveraged \$346,023 of in-kind contributions to community projects, an average of 42% of total project costs.

Overall Progress Towards Targets (USAID-specified indicators, coded in Web-PRS)

Code	Description	Impact		Unit
1.1	Number of communities with CAIP projects	105		community
1.2	Number of projects implemented without donor support	Anecdotal evidence*		Project
1.3	Percent of costs covered by community or local government contributions	Cash 0%	In-Kind 42%	Percent
2.1	Number of projects maintained by the community	105		Project
2.2	Number of beneficiaries	181,858		People
2.3	Number of communities that tap into other USAID or donor programs in the region	100		Community
3.1	Number of people employed through projects	458		People
3.2	Number of people employed after project completed	14		People
3.3	Number of people trained	700+		People

Progress per country

	TAJ	UZB	TKM	KYR	Total	Diff.	Notes
Communities							
Expected	25	21	10	N/A	56		
Achieved	25	21	3	N/A	49	-7	TKM: Suspension of Program
Projects							
Expected	63	54	20	N/A	137		UZB: Larger & fewer projects
Achieved	67	38	0	N/A	105	-32	TKM: Suspension of Program
Beneficiaries	97,646	84,212			181,858		
Project Value							
Mercy Corps	\$192,336	\$294,218	0	N/A	\$ 486,554		
Communities	\$174,988	\$171,035	0	N/A	\$ 346,023		
Total	\$367,324	\$465,254	0	N/A	\$ 832,578		
% Community	48%	37%			42%		

Note about the figures in this report: The CAIP program was suspended in Turkmenistan in early 2003, pending national-level government approval. As of the time of suspension, CAIP had been working in three communities, and anticipated working in an additional seven. Mercy Corps takes an optimistic view, assuming CAIP will continue in Turkmenistan. Therefore all figures in this report reflect that we are working in three communities in Turkmenistan and will ultimately work in a total of ten.

* Anecdotal evidence suggests a wide assortment of small community projects and related activities being undertaken in CAIP communities without donor support. However, it is not always possible to isolate these projects for counting purposes, nor attribute them to the presence of CAIP in the community.

Progress During the Reporting Period

The three pillars of CAIP are these three Intermediate Results objectives:

1. Participatory and democratic processes strengthened at the community level;
2. Community social services improved through community action; and
3. Creation of sustainable and short-term jobs.

CAIP has achieved positive results towards all three of these IRs. One year into the project, data indicates that participatory processes have been strengthened at the community level, community social services have been improved through community action, and short-term jobs have been created.

This report describes CAIP progress towards meeting each of these three IRs. However, CAIP takes an integrated approach to community empowerment with cross-cutting themes addressed throughout the implementation of each IR. Cross-cutting themes include: participatory decision-making, transparency among community members and with local government, inclusion of underrepresented groups such as women and youth, sustainability of infrastructure projects and of community action groups themselves (formal and informal), and continuous capacity-building. Implicit in all of these themes is the goal of conflict prevention.

CAIP's approach towards addressing these cross-cutting themes is described throughout this report.

Intermediate Result #1: Participatory and democratic processes strengthened at the community level

Empower citizens to take an active role in defining and fulfilling community needs, alleviating tensions that might otherwise lead to conflict.

Year One Results

Expected Results over the 3-year life of CAIP (including expansion activities):

At least 75 communities will be better able to cooperatively identify common problems, design and implement solutions through civic action and collaboration with local authorities and social service organizations. This process will strengthen local democratic processes through participatory planning, critical thinking/problem solving, accountability and transparency. As a result, community social capital is increased (generalized trust, community-based trust, and trust in institutions).

Expected results to date (pre-expansion):

For the first year of CAIP, Mercy Corps had planned to work in 56 communities (21 in Uzbekistan, 25 in Tajikistan, and 10 in Turkmenistan). Due to unforeseen difficulties with CAIP approval in Turkmenistan, Mercy Corps was only able to engage three communities there. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, we are on target, with 46 total communities.

Expected results for the next reporting period (3rd quarter 2003):

Under the CAIP expansion, Mercy Corps will add ten communities in the Rasht Valley, Tajikistan, bringing the total to 35 communities in Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, Mercy Corps will add five CAIP communities in Namangan Oblast, bringing the total to 26. Mercy Corps will also begin working in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan, adding four communities there. The total number of communities in the Ferghana Valley and Tajikistan will be 65. In the event that CAIP is approved in Turkmenistan, we anticipate working in the existing three communities, and adding the seven originally planned, for a total of ten communities in Turkmenistan. The total number of Mercy Corps' CAIP communities is expected to be 75.

Number of CAIP Communities Year 1

	TAJ	UZB	TKM	KYR	Total	Deviation
Expected	25	21	10	0	56	
Achieved	25	21	3	0	49	-7 (suspension of TKM)
Expansion	10	5	0	4	19	
Total	35	26	10	4	75	Expected by 3 rd Qtr 2003

Detailed profiles of CAIP communities are available at <http://caip.usaidcar.info/>

How do we know when a community is “mobilized”?

The cornerstone of CAIP's approach to strengthening democratic and participatory processes is community mobilization. Mercy Corps defines community mobilization as the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change. Mercy Corps considers that a CAIP community is “mobilized” when there is a participatory, representative group (in our case this is a Community Action Group (CAG)), which is accountable to the community, and is competent to mobilize human, financial, and physical resources from within and outside the community to meet community needs. A mobilized community follows open and transparent processes in all decisions which affect the community. The community is well-informed, understands how the CAG works, how membership on the CAG changes, is free to assess/evaluate the work of the CAG, and holds the CAG accountable to the wider community. All sectors of a mobilized community (government, business, and non-governmental groups) are actively engaged in community activities.



Community Mobilization Process

Community Mobilization is a broad process, which is utilized in all of the activities in CAIP's three IRs. CAIP's community mobilization process begins with site selection and continues throughout the infrastructure rehabilitation process, which is itself participatory. After site selection (which was described in our previous semi-annual report), CAIP CDOs conduct a large community meeting with 100-200 people, including informal and formal community leaders, representatives of key institutions such as schools and medical clinics, and local government representatives. Mercy Corps Community Development Officers (CDOs) use a participatory methodology to introduce Mercy Corps to the community, and to describe the CAIP project and USAID. The CDOs present material they have prepared in advance, in Uzbek language, using terminology and

concepts which will be clear to the community, given their limited experience with international organizations. From this meeting, a smaller group of people (40-60) is selected by the community to attend a Consensus Workshop, at which a more detailed discussion of community needs and priorities emerges through SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). The representatives of this meeting, using participatory methods, select the first small infrastructure project, and elect a Community Action Group (8-12 members) to oversee its implementation and coordinate CAIP activities. At all of these meetings, great attention and care is devoted to ensuring that the meetings are representative, ensuring geographic, ethnic, gender, and age balance as much as possible.

Throughout the implementation of the infrastructure projects, the CAG meets regularly to make work plans, to engage community members in the project through volunteer labor and other contributions, and to undertake project implementation activities. A "transparency board" is maintained at a central location in each community, where project documents, budgets, and photographs are displayed to keep the community informed of progress. CAGs hold regular meetings with the wider community throughout the implementation of community projects, to increase the flow of information between the CAGs and the community. The CAG is ultimately accountable to the community for the quality of project implementation. Mercy Corps staff work with CAGs, and the CAGs work with the wider community on all aspects of project implementation and social events.



After the experience gained from the first infrastructure project, Mercy Corps guides the communities through a Confirmation Workshop, where the community analyzes lessons learned during the first project, adjusts the membership on the CAG to replace members who are not active or who can not commit the necessary time to subsequent projects, and confirms or changes the selection of the next project based on what they learned during the first project. These confirmation meetings are a good way to promote transparency and inclusion of the wider community. The confirmation meeting provides an opportunity to involve people who were not necessarily involved in the first meeting (or the early phases of the project) to join the process and have their voices heard. In communities that have the capacity to implement two projects simultaneously, Project Implementation Teams (PITs) may be selected to implement each project. This formation is common in Tajikistan. PITs are a subgroup of the CAG, and are accountable to the CAG. Even in cases where a PIT is not formed, CAGs may decide to hire a paid project manager or contract work out to private firms.

One important factor in the community mobilization process is the commitment from Mercy Corps' CDOs to become part of the communities where they work. Mercy Corps uses two to three-person teams, all of whom are mobilizers, and/or have technical expertise in engineering. Some teams have a specific point-person for youth activities. Each team works in an average of five communities, allowing the team to meet with each community at least once per week (However, in the Rasht Valley, Tajikistan, in particular, teams are challenged by the time they actually spend on overland travel in rough conditions, which places excess demands on teams and taxes resources). The team members gain an in-depth knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the CAGs and the unique challenges faced in each community. They understand the particular cultural constraints faced in the communities (for example, the taboo of having women participate in meetings with men). It is this familiarity with the individual needs of the communities and CAG members that allows Mercy Corps to tailor its mobilization approach to the specific needs of that community. This also allows Mercy Corps CDOs to understand the

complexities of particular communities that have real or perceived resource allocation tensions. This understanding allows the CDOs to help guide the communities through the process of addressing those tensions.

CDO Teams also adjust work schedules to accommodate the constraints faced by the community in terms of harvest season, spring planting season, market days, school season (restricting the dates for school projects), rainy weather (impacting paving and roofing), weddings, funerals, snow, heat, and holiday celebrations. Allowing the community to implement projects and hold meetings on their own schedule promotes greater buy-in from the community and promotes the concept of sustainability. The communities see that they can do a project even with constraints due to seasonal agricultural work, market days, etc. This flexibility also allows all members of the community to participate, not only those who do not work or have free time.

Over the course of year one, Mercy Corps has:

- Established 49 democratically-elected Community Action Groups (one in each community), each with 8-12 members, an average of 25% of whom are women; and
- Conducted consensus-building workshops in each community, transferring skills in participatory methods to over 500 CAG members, which many have replicated in their own community meetings without Mercy Corps guidance. Over 3000 community members have been introduced to participatory methods during such community meetings.

Integration of Social Projects

Social projects are essential to community mobilization. The number of community members involved in infrastructure project implementation varies depending on the size and scale of the project. In some cases, specialized technical labor is required, and few community members are involved. In order to keep the level of engagement of the community high during the implementation of these projects, complementary social projects are integrated into infrastructure projects (see example below). The value of social projects can not be underestimated in the community mobilization process. They bring a wider section of the community together, forging a better understanding of CAIP, the work of the CAG, and the benefits of community collaboration.

For example: on a road paving project in Oyim, Uzbekistan, the justification for paving the road was that the dirt road was dangerous for children to walk to school. There had been a number of tragic accidents. What began as a road paving project became a road safety project, involving parents and children in a safety campaign. This kept the community engaged while the workers paved the road. Communities implementing road paving projects have also chosen to do sports events on the smooth pavement (such as running). Children also do chalk drawings on the roads.



In Qoraq'org'on, Uzbekistan, there was a large Navruz celebration that brought together both Kyrgyz and Uzbeks for a celebration of the project and the holiday. Residents planned a large celebration that included traditional Uzbek songs and dances, and Kyrgyz yurt competitions. The event engaged the community and sparked even more interest in the next project.

In Sokh enclave, Uzbekistan, doctors at the clinic that CAIP helped repair did a project on "Anemia and How to Prevent It" for women in the community. The project was highlighting the

fact that women in Sokh have a very high rate of anemia, and also helped to inform more women in the community about the new project and CAIP in general.

The completion of an infrastructure project is a milestone in every community. The communities are eager to celebrate and publicize their success. The opening ceremonies have become an opportunity to invite CAGs from neighboring communities, local and regional government representatives, and Mercy Corps and USAID representatives, to share lessons learned through community mobilization and project implementation. In many cases, these events have motivated nearby CAIP communities to increase their mobilization activities, and have leveraged more government support for community projects. Another benefit of these meetings are exchanges that are arranged between communities which are either implementing or planning to implement similar projects. Engineers, local government officials, and/or project managers from one community will go to another community to help with project planning and design. The more experienced CAG members offer advice based on their experience.

Over the course of year one, Mercy Corps has completed over 40 social projects, such as cooking competitions, Navruz celebrations, sports events, etc., involving approximately 700 people.

Continuous Capacity-building

Capacity-building is a key component of the community mobilization process. In the first year of CAIP implementation, Mercy Corps prioritized experiential learning over a structured CAG curriculum of trainings. CAIP staff transfer skills in participatory action planning to CAG and community members, and encourage them to use these methods in their own community meetings. By the end of year one, our most active CAGs were using these skills and holding facilitated participatory community meetings without the involvement of Mercy Corps staff. CAIP CDOs notice that the community responds better when members of their own community facilitate the meeting, and are working with CAG and other active community members to develop their facilitation skills.

The implementation of the first “confidence building” infrastructure project provided an invaluable learning experience for the CAG and the community. On-site training was provided to CAGs on project design, budgeting, procurement (following transparent practices), project management, and final project review. The CAGs worked closely with Mercy Corps’ CDOs on all of these steps, but increasingly, CAGs are handling subsequent projects with less and less coaching from the CDOs. CAG members have also developed skills in interacting with local government. Project documentation requires approval from various levels of government, and CAGs have been encouraged to interact with local authorities from the beginning to strengthen relations and ensure continued governmental support.

Because of the CDOs’ familiarity with the communities in which they work, they are able to adapt their coaching roles as needed on a case-by-case basis. Mercy Corps’ CDOs have remarked during a session on lessons learned to date, on the importance of spending a lot of time in the communities, building relationships and trust, and conducting trainings and focus group discussions in order to fully engage communities and ensure successful mobilization. Continuous feedback is also given to the CAG members (and from CAG members to CDOs), to strengthen communication between Mercy Corps and the community, and to increase mutual understanding to resolve issues.

After the first year of the project, Mercy Corps is deeply engaged in CAIP communities. Infrastructure projects and quick results attracted the attention of the communities at first, but the professionalism of CAIP CDOs and Mercy Corps’ demonstrated commitment to improving the communities has earned the lasting respect and trust of community members, which is an

invaluable component of successful community mobilization. Mercy Corps has developed positive relationships with government, businesses, and civic organizations in all our communities.

Over the course of year one, Mercy Corps conducted experiential training exercises with all CAGs, building skills in needs assessment, project design, project management, financial management, procurement, transparency and accountability, reaching over 500 CAG members and numerous community members.

Intermediate Result #2: Improved community social services through community action

Improve standard of living and empowerment in CAIP communities, which leads to a decrease in potential for conflict.

Year One Results

Expected Results over the 3-year life of CAIP (including expansion activities):

Completion of 4-7 small infrastructure projects in 75 communities, for a total of between 300 and 525 projects. Over 392,000 beneficiaries (an average of 5200 per community) will have gas, electricity and/or similar services through the provision of improved infrastructure, human and physical resources, including improved community ownership and responsibility through existing or new associations, maintenance committees and users-groups/associations. Expenditures of \$37,500 to \$75,000 expected per community.

Expected results to date (pre-expansion):

During year one, CAIP communities have completed or are implementing 105 projects in 46 communities (excluding Turkmenistan), reaching 181,858 beneficiaries. (65 completed projects, 40 under execution). Total project value is \$832,578, of which \$346,023 (42%) is community match.

Expected results for the next reporting period (3rd quarter 2003):

With the end of the prime construction season looming, we anticipate completing 40 projects currently under execution during 3rd quarter 2003.

CAIP Infrastructure Projects Completed or Under Execution Year 1

	TAJ	UZB	TKM	KYR	Total	Notes
Expected	63	54	20	0	137	Suspension of TKM program Fewer & larger projects in UZB
Achieved	67	38	0	0	105	
Deviation	+4	-16	-20	N/A	-32	

Details about specific CAIP community projects is available at <http://caip.usaidcar.info/>

Preventing Conflict through Infrastructure Projects

The implementation of infrastructure projects in CAIP is a key tool for alleviating tensions in communities and demonstrating the value of community mobilization. Infrastructure projects produce tangible, immediate benefits, which the community must see in order to buy-into other CAIP activities, such as workshops and seminars to promote participatory decision-making, principles of transparency and accountability, etc. Infrastructure projects such as gas, electric,

and drinking water systems directly improve the quality of people's lives, increase their sense of well-being, and decrease frustrations and tensions over unmet needs for services.

Infrastructure projects directly address conflicts over resources where they exist, by alleviating tensions between people with access and people without (often ethnically differentiated). Projects associated with the provision of utilities and public works alleviate tensions between government and communities, as communities gain an increased understanding of local government constraints (such as lack of resources, which are concentrated in capital cities). Local government representatives gain an increased understanding of community needs, and the participatory methodology and facilitation techniques promote constructive dialog between government representatives and community members.



Mercy Corps selected communities based on a potential for conflict, often caused by a lack of access to resources, or a real or perceived inequitable distribution of resources due to ethnic or other factors. When CAIP brings a representative group of community members together from all segments of the community (those with access to a key resource, and those without) to discuss the shared needs of the entire community, the collective group often prioritizes a project that meets the needs of only part of the community, recognizing that ultimately it benefits the entire community.

For example, in Haqqulobod, Uzbekistan, a natural gas project was prioritized, which would bring gas to only three streets in the community that were without gas (the rest of the streets all had gas). Yet all members of the community supported the project, and people from all parts of the community shared in the implementation of that project, even though few people directly benefited. The community as a whole voted to correct an inequitable situation, and alleviate potential tension.

In Qoraq'org'on, Uzbekistan, the lower half of the mahalla, which is predominantly Uzbek, had gas, while the upper half, which is mainly Kyrgyz, did not. An ethnically mixed CAG chose to extend the gas pipeline into the upper mahalla, thereby decreasing the resource disparity and encouraging the two sides of the community to work together.

These examples show that the participatory methodology used in the selection and implementation of community projects results in an increased sense of shared resources and a desire to meet the collective needs of the community. The pooling of resources, and willingness to work on behalf of others in the community alleviates tensions and reduces the potential for conflict. The methodology also brings together divided communities that previously acted as separate entities. CAIP brings the two sides of the community together and forms one shared CAG.

It is worth mentioning the relatively high number of road projects implemented in Mercy Corps' CAIP communities. At first glance, road paving may seem like a lower priority for the average CAIP community than gas or water. However, many CAIP communities consistently mention road paving as one of the highest priorities. There are many reasons for this – road safety for pedestrians who walk along the side of the road, improved access to public transportation, increased access to markets and resources, and increased civic pride and status of the community. Popular projects such as these are extremely valuable as a mobilization tool, which alleviates tensions in the community.

Sustainability of Infrastructure Projects

CAIP strives to link infrastructure projects to existing sustainability structures or processes in the community. Government agencies, which have mandates to maintain road and gas supply systems, for example, become partners in maintaining projects implemented with CAIP assistance.

Whenever possible, infrastructure projects are tied to pricing mechanisms or usage fee structures, determined by the community. Usage can be measured by meters (such as gas & water), and the appropriate agency or community-established users committee can collect fees for maintaining and repairing the system.

The informal community system of *hashar*, where community members voluntarily contribute funds for periodic repairs, has been very effective in mobilizing community contribution to projects, and can also be employed for maintaining the projects longer term. This process is invaluable in cases where it is not feasible to legally register an organization with the authority to handle funds (which is usually the case in Uzbekistan).

Tender Process

An invaluable tool for demonstrating the principle of transparency is the conduction of tenders for infrastructure supplies and/or services (with a value of over \$10,000). A recent tender meeting for non-asbestos roofing materials in the Rasht Valley included representatives of seven local vendors, CAG members (who must be involved in every tender), Mercy Corps staff, local government representatives, and representatives from two other CAIP implementing organizations, RRDP and AKF.



Each vendor had been previously provided with the technical specifications for the roofing tiles, the quantity required, and the timeframe for project implementation. The tiles were for several school roofing projects, which needed to be completed before the start of the academic year. The sealed bids were opened in the presence of all the meeting attendees, the price-quotes were entered into a table on a flip-chart, and the documents reviewed for completeness and accuracy.

Vendors were asked to submit their business licenses, tax inspection number and clearance, bank account information, debt clearance from other implementing partners and lending organizations, and references. Vendors also provided samples of the roofing materials.

Once the bids were recorded, the vendors were asked to leave the room. The tender committee then evaluated each bid, verifying that the bids met the required criteria, and that the vendors were appropriately registered in Garm City. An animated discussion followed, analyzing the merits and weaknesses of each bid in terms of price, quality, and service of the vendor. Two finalist vendors were called back into the room for follow-up questions, and one was selected.

Afterwards, the reasons for selecting one vendor were explained to those who had been rejected, giving them incentive to improve their chances next time. The decision was not only based on price, but on confidence in the vendor to meet the deadline, and a reputation for quality and reliability.

Longer than expected implementation times

In many cases, CAIP infrastructure projects have taken longer to complete than expected. This is due to a number of factors, such as seasonal constraints, lack of available construction materials, dependence on volunteer labor, and lack of project management experience of CAG members.

Mercy Corps predicted that the winter season would be a difficult time to implement projects, but the delays were more widespread and longer than we expected. Winter came early and lasted long this year. In rural CAIP communities, the spring planting and summer harvest interrupted work times. Since most CAIP projects rely on volunteer labor, we had to wait until the community members were available to work. To keep communities engaged, we encouraged communities to implement social projects, and we conducted training activities when construction was not possible. In the Rasht Valley, it is especially challenging to implement infrastructure projects during the short summer window of opportunity. In Shartuz, the summer heat meant working in the early morning and late afternoon only.

In the Rasht Valley, an already challenging situation is further complicated by the need to purchase construction materials in Dushanbe and then transport them to Rasht Valley. In addition, the materials available for purchase in Dushanbe are of lower quality than those of Uzbekistan but the prices paid, due to transportation costs, are considerably higher. The Rasht Valley also lacks qualified, licensed building materials contractors who are able to obtain high quality materials, resulting in a lack of competition. Vendors in both countries are often unreliable for providing supplies on time and according to required price and quality specifications.



We also faced challenges in mobilizing community labor. In many cases, the enthusiasm and diligence of volunteer labor far exceeded our expectations, such as in Haqqulobod, Uzbekistan, where a large contingent of men from the community dug a trench by hand through asphalt when the digging equipment broke down. However, in other communities, where the scope of the work was poorly understood by CAG members (particularly during the first project), projects were delayed when necessary labor could not be mobilized in time, or when laborers were unavailable to work.

Mercy Corps' approach to coping with these constraints varies in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In Uzbekistan, after the initial confidence-building projects, many communities demonstrated a capacity to implement larger and simultaneous projects, which we have encouraged. These communities have the skills to manage larger projects, and have indicated they can contribute the necessary 30% match.

In Tajikistan, the small community populations and limited labor force prevent large-scale projects but communities typically choose to implement at least two projects simultaneously, via the PIT structure. In several communities in the Rasht Valley, infrastructure projects such as irrigation systems, benefit more than one community, naturally forming clusters of communities. This is very helpful when mobilizing labor and providing community contribution, and we've also found that it can help develop, or reinforce, positive collaborative relationships among communities. However, cluster projects also present some significant logistical problems when trying to coordinate community contribution amongst several communities. Conducting multiple

projects simultaneously allows more work to be accomplished during the short summer season. Mercy Corps has adjusted its work plan to emphasize training and other mobilization activities during the winter months when construction is not possible.

Increasingly, as local governments become more involved, they are willing to contribute more to projects and to engage in joint projects. In Namangan, the government will be making a significant contribution to a large drinking water system in a CAIP community, which currently has water delivered by truck. The community had previously been told by the government that the project would not be technically or financially feasible. Since CAIP began working in that community, Mercy Corps' CDOs, CAG members, and local government officials collaboratively researched and found a solution. The project is currently in the review phase.

Intermediate Result #3: Creation of sustainable and short-term jobs

Improve standard of living in CAIP communities through increased incomes and job opportunities. Communities will be better able to meet needs from own resources, leading to decrease in potential for conflict.

Year One Results

Expected Results over the 3-year life of CAIP (including expansion activities):

At least 75 communities will benefit from increased or sustained job opportunities and incomes through employment on infrastructure projects and participation in community economic development projects.

Expected results for this reporting period (pre-expansion):

The economic development component of CAIP is just getting started under the expansion, granted in June 2003. In addition to the Economic Development activities, CAIP continues to employ community members on the construction of community infrastructure projects, and in their long-term maintenance. In most cases, community members provide in-kind labor for these projects. However, specialized labor and project management are paid positions. To date, CAIP has generated 458 short-term jobs, and 14 long-term jobs through the implementation of infrastructure projects. The infusion of capital and increased economic activity associated with infrastructure projects undoubtedly has a domino effect in creating more jobs with CAIP vendors and subcontracted construction companies.

Expected results for the next reporting period (3rd quarter 2003):

Short and long-term employment generated through infrastructure projects will continue throughout the life of CAIP and onwards, where communities are able to continue to mobilize their own resources. In third quarter 2003, CAIP will establish Community Development Councils, conduct business training, and begin selecting community business initiatives for support.

Description of Economic Development Activities

Every CAIP community cites lack of employment opportunities as an obstacle to development, and as a prime source of tension in communities. Job creation for young men is especially important. The lack of jobs for young men, combined with the lack of constructive social activities in the community, leads to alienation and an increase in petty crime and other negative behavior. In some cases, young men may be attracted to join extremist groups who promise them money and job opportunities. The lack of jobs also encourages out-migration from CAIP communities to

urban centers in other parts of Central Asia, and to Russia, as young men seek jobs and income opportunities.

Mercy Corps CAIP began implementation of its economic development component as part of the CAIP expansion awarded in June 2003. As of the date of this report, these activities are just getting started. CAIP economic development activities support sustainable economic growth in CAIP communities by supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses, creating sustainable long-term employment and increased incomes.

CAIP Economic Development Officers will work closely with community members, local government and business experts from international and national organizations to identify and support economic opportunities. Support to CAIP communities will include, market assessments, business development training, advisory services, economic development grants, and credit for businesses and entrepreneurs.

Community Development Councils (CDCs) will be formed in communities to coordinate economic development activities. The CDC is a community-based transparent body that brings expertise and specialization to the community's economic development process while actively involving community members in the process. The CDC will include representation from local government, CAGs, local micro-finance institutions, international and local NGO's, and local business experts. CAIP's work with CDCs will increase the capacity of and cooperation between government, businesses and community members in planning their economic development.

Cross-cutting Objectives

USAID designed CAIP with two cross-cutting objectives: Conflict Mitigation, and the Inclusion of Youth. Each of the three Intermediate Results is united under these two common themes, and all Mercy Corps' CAIP program activities incorporate strategies directed at meeting these two cross-cutting objectives.

Sources of Conflict Mitigated in Target Communities

All of Mercy Corps' CAIP communities were selected based on indications of high levels of tension potentially leading to conflict (this process was described in our previous semi-annual report in November 2002). Mercy Corps selected CAIP communities according to a modified Tension Index provided by USAID, and adapted for the Central Asian context. Key factors analyzed include history of land and resource-based conflicts in the community, high unemployment particularly among young men, evidence of inequitable (or perceived inequitable) treatment of residents based on ethnicity or other factors, the potential for youth radicalization (due to disenfranchisement), presence of religious extremist groups, high crime, failed industries and lack of economic opportunity, lack of confidence/distrust of government institutions, inadequate social services, and deteriorating social infrastructure.

Mercy Corps' CAIP staff target the sources of tension most likely to lead to conflict. By addressing high youth unemployment through our economic development component, CAIP seeks to engage young men who might otherwise become disenfranchised and be more likely to join or be recruited to religious extremist groups. CAIP is also targeting communities where land or resource-based conflicts are linked to ethnic tensions, which could also trigger conflict.

Mercy Corps' CAIP community mobilization activities take a two-pronged approach to mitigating conflict in Central Asia: 1). Structure: establishing Community Action Groups (CAGs) with democratic principles who have the necessary knowledge and skills to cope with tension or



conflict in their own communities; and 2). Process: Demonstrating principles of transparency and accountability by working together with communities, local government, and the private sector during the implementation of small infrastructure and social projects. During this process, necessary knowledge, skills, and values are transferred to the CAGs through experiential learning and structured training. The projects themselves improve conditions in the community, and the process demonstrates a mechanism by which future problems can be addressed.

A field study undertaken by Mercy Corps in May 2003 concluded that community mobilization is an effective program approach for conflict prevention in Central Asia.¹ The study specifically analyzed CAIP (and the Peaceful Communities Initiative (PCI)), and demonstrated that community mobilization works, because it is “practical, hands-on and addresses community-identified needs from the grassroots perspective.”

The study concluded that programs can be assumed to be contributing towards conflict prevention if they meet the following four criteria:

- Increased shared resources between and within communities.
- Increased positive contact and sustained relations within and between communities, both general and individual.
- Increased knowledge and transparency between and within communities.
- Communities develop, adopt and take ownership of new problem solving skills.

CAIP's community mobilization process has led to positive results for all four criteria, using the implementation of infrastructure projects as a key tool.

Inclusion of youth

Large numbers of youth (ages 15-25) are unemployed, underemployed or unemployable due to a combination of factors. First, real jobs (ones that pay a regular salary) are scarce and labor is plentiful in these weak economies. Second, strong central governments in the region promote Soviet-style full employment policies, maintaining large and inefficient state farms that provide the bulk of official employment. While these farms are profitable for the central government (which controls cotton exports), they normally do not provide a living wage to farm labor. Third, many youth lack useful skills, business knowledge and access to credit that would allow them to find employment or generate sustainable incomes on their own initiative. While these economic factors affect all segments of the population, the youth situation may be most dangerous, since in many parts of these three countries they represent roughly half of the entire population. Without hope for a better future, many turn to drugs and alcohol abuse and petty crime. They also provide a potentially fertile breeding ground for violent extremist movements that seem to offer a way out of their predicament.

The active engagement of youth (ages 15 to 25) in CAIP community mobilization and projects is essential to awaken a sense of responsibility in young people, which benefits the whole community. Involving youth in CAG decision-making processes and infrastructure repair projects helps youth learn life-skills centered on community decision-making, and also helps them develop

¹ Mercy Corps. *Ferghana Valley Field Study: Reducing the Potential for Conflict through Community Mobilization*. 2003. Available in electronic form at: www.mercycorps.org

employable skills. It also increases the self-confidence of young people and demonstrates their capabilities to adults in the community. Social skills of youth are strengthened through interaction with each other, with mahalla members, with government officials, and with Mercy Corps staff. Youth also gain an increased understanding of the responsibilities of being a citizen, and how empowered citizens can affect social change in their communities.

CAIP endeavors to include youth in community mobilization in a number of ways, without creating a separate “youth” program, which we thought might increase the social isolation of young people. Youth are directly invited to community meetings, as are youth support individuals (teachers, parents, youth center instructors, orphanage caretakers, coaches, master craftsmen). In some communities, young people serve as CAG members, though this is sometimes problematic as community elders do not always take the opinion of young people seriously, or do not believe they are experienced enough at life to make a valuable contribution to the CAG. In those communities, CAIP is supporting separate youth councils to give young people a forum to discuss issues important to them, to develop youth-oriented projects, and to identify mechanisms to participate on the community-wide CAG. Through these youth councils, youth networks are strengthened, as are young peoples’ skills in advocating for their needs in the larger community forum.



In addition to increasing the involvement of youth in community decision-making processes, CAIP involves young people on the design, planning, and implementation of community projects. Through an established mentoring program, young people in CAIP communities are paired with a volunteer mentor from the CAG, who works with the young person to expose him/her to discussions of community issues, decision-making, and project planning/implementation. Youth learn valuable skills in negotiation, procurement, budgeting, transparency, work-planning, accountability, technical drawing, monitoring, and organizing special events. In a system which builds on the Soviet tradition of the Master/Trainee program, young people work on community infrastructure projects with a mentor, learning marketable skills for future employment (for example: plastering, carpentry, asphaltting, and other hands-on technical labor). Young people also increase their connections with potential employers from construction companies or vendors.

As a result of CAIP’s focus on youth engagement in community mobilization, attitudes among community members, young and old, are changing. A young person from Qoraq’org’on community put it this way, “We understood that no one could resolve our problems, we should be more active and involve everyone into resolving community problems.” Young people are learning how to cooperate with their elders, and elders are gaining respect for the opinions of young people. Many young people in CAIP communities are noticing that adults are listening to them before decisions are made, whereas in the past the opinions of youth were not taken seriously. A community elder in Rishton described his attitudinal change this way, “ When we first participated in CAIP, we selected the most experienced and old members of our community onto the CAG. Now I understand that was not right. Old people can lead us in some events, but we must re-elect the CAG members. They all must be young, energetic, and willing to serve the community, and we do have such people here.”

Challenges and Opportunities

Working in Urban Areas

"Given limited resources and a belief that more densely populated areas with few employment options, limited access to land, and deteriorating infrastructure are fertile recruitment areas for extremism, more attention should be focused on urban areas." USAID

Working in densely populated urban areas presents unique challenges for community mobilization work. The size of the city and the complicated administrative structures in place can make project implementation difficult, and the nature of urban areas tends to see communities that are less cohesive than in rural areas. Additionally, measuring the impact of working in mahallas in a large urban center can be difficult. While the difficulties of community mobilization efforts in urban areas will likely change over time, initial impressions and strategies for overcoming such challenges are outlined below.

Site Selection Working in a large city such as Namangan, with a population of 396,000, presents a unique challenge in terms of site selection. The city of Namangan has dozens of mahallas, with an average of several thousand people in each. Trying to pinpoint one or two mahallas where the program will have the biggest impact can be very difficult, particularly if the city administration is not helpful or cooperative. In larger cities, infrastructure is usually in place, though it may be in disrepair or unable to cope with population increases. As such, attempting to identify the infrastructure needs can be more difficult than in smaller rural communities.

In the case of Namangan, CAIP teams approached the local hokimyat to get their suggestions for communities that were particularly in need of infrastructure repairs, and used that list as a starting point for conducting a conflict based assessment of several communities. While this will only be useful if local authorities are cooperative, initial conversations with the city hokim were successful, and a number of communities were suggested for a needs assessment. Working with authorities in the larger cities is extremely helpful, as conducting assessments in every Mahalla is impossible.

In Tajikistan, site selection is complicated by the large number of INGO's currently using community based planning approaches in Rasht Valley communities. Extensive coordination is necessary with Aga Kahn and UNDP, the two other CAIP implementers in Rasht Valley, to ensure that the programs are not duplicating efforts.

Administrative Approval Another challenge that is heightened in urban centers is administrative approval. All projects implemented by CAIP require the approval of all relevant local and regional authorities, and this can be quite complicated in a city with many layers of bureaucracy. Additionally, it is sometimes difficult for community members to access the necessary authorities, unlike in smaller towns and villages where the local authorities are much closer to the population. Infrastructure needs in large cities will tend to be more complex, and may involve a number of agencies and administrative levels, and this can be very difficult to negotiate. An example of a project of this nature is the anticipated sewer system project in the center of Kokand.

As with site approval, having the support of the local government is very important, and while it is not CAIP teams that seek the necessary approvals, it makes it easier for the community if the city government is aware of the program and supports the work being done. In addition, careful planning during the project review phases allows the CAG to plan for and anticipate what kinds of

approvals will be necessary and to delegate those tasks to make the process more manageable. At the beginning, CAIP implemented small projects with fairly basic levels of approval, but the lessons learned from these experiences proved to be extremely valuable with larger projects.

Sense of Community The sense of community in city mahallas is often more fragile than in villages and towns. In a city such as Kokand, it is likely that mahalla residents will not all be acquainted, and there may be less of a support network for troubled youth outside their family. In addition, there may be more turnover among the population, and individuals or families living in communities who are recent arrivals. The lack of cohesion can make consensus building more difficult in terms of project selection, and identifying a strong community action group can be challenging. Additionally, city residents are often more apathetic about social services and their ability to influence authorities than their village counterparts.

Partially in response to the need to encourage a sense of community in larger urban areas, Pre Consensus meetings have been started to inform large groups and to get diverse segments of the Mahalla thinking as a community. Pre Consensus meetings usually attract between 100-200 residents and present information about Mercy Corps, USAID, CAIP, Community Action Groups, and give community members a chance to ask questions about the program. Another strategy has been the use of Transparency Boards, which allow communities to stay informed and engaged in the process, even in large mahallas.

Gender Equity in the Rasht Valley

The conservative traditions in the Rasht Valley have made it difficult to ensure active participation of women in decision-making processes. While women attend CAIP meetings and serve as members of CAGs, their voices are not often taken seriously or reflected in decisions taken by the community. Unfortunately, this challenge is manifested even among Mercy Corps' own staff. Mercy Corps is committed to hiring staff from the communities in which we work. As such, extra effort has been paid to recruiting women from the Rasht Valley as CDOs. As of early 2003, we had only one female CDO out of eight in Rasht, and her frequent travel to remote villages was met by suspicion by her family. A second female mobilizer, recruited in June 2003, encountered similar resistance from her family. Fortunately, both of these women have worked through these issues and remain valuable members of the CAIP staff. And in order to ensure women in CAIP communities have an opportunity to openly air their concerns, we have begun meeting with groups of women separately from the men. We then work with these women's groups to integrate their concerns into the larger community forum.



Mercy Corps also faced a dilemma when a CAIP community in Garm requested support for a social project to pay for transportation of children to a summer camp. The goals of the project sounded good – bringing one busload of kids from the Rasht Valley to a summer camp outside Dushanbe. However upon further investigation, we discovered no girls would be allowed to go. CAIP staff discussed this with the community, who seemed shocked at the idea that girls could possibly attend such an event.

Though we were reluctant to deny the boys the opportunity, and we had misgivings about pressing our western values so strongly on the community, we ultimately decided not to support the project.

Management Transitions

The last six months have seen some significant management transitions on the CAIP staff. Our Chief of Party departed in March, and the Deputy Chief of Party position was relocated from Tashkent to Dushanbe. We also created a second Deputy Chief of Party position for the Ferghana Valley, to reflect the increasing complexity of Mercy Corps projects there (expanded CAIP and PCI programs).

Also, in light of the introduction of the economic development component of CAIP, we created a new Project Manager position to oversee economic development activities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. We also recruited Economic Development Officers in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

To better support our youth integration activities, we have added two Youth Opportunities positions, one in Tajikistan, and one in the Ferghana valley.

Turkmenistan

From June 2002, until February 2003, CAIP undertook community mobilization activities in three communities in the Lebap Velayat of Turkmenistan. Community Action Groups were formed, and confidence-building projects identified and reviewed. Initial trainings were conducted successfully with CAGs and community members.

However, in March 2003, the CAIP project was suspended in Turkmenistan when CAIP's Project Manager was denied a visa, resulting in his permanent departure from Turkmenistan. The refusal to renew his visa was an indication that CAIP was not a welcome project in Turkmenistan. CAIP national staff were unable to continue working in three existing CAIP communities, nor to begin working in seven additional planned communities. Though the Lebap Velayat authorities were supportive of CAIP, and preliminary community mobilization activities were overwhelmingly positive in the Lebap communities, there was great reluctance from the local authorities, and a reticence among the communities, to permit CAIP to continue without national-level approval.

Since then, USAID and Mercy Corps have been working through government channels to obtain official national-level government approval for CAIP to operate in Turkmenistan. As of the date of this report, approval has not been forthcoming. Mercy Corps has been left with no alternative but to lay-off CAIP staff until the issue can be resolved.

Plans for upcoming reporting period

CAIP Expansion

In June 2003, USAID awarded Mercy Corps an expansion to the CAIP cooperative agreement, allowing us to add 10 communities in the Rasht Valley, Tajikistan, 5 communities in Namangan Oblast, Uzbekistan, and 4 communities in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan.

Competition Eases the Legacy of Conflict

“During sports competitions all wars and conflicts are forgotten and forgiven.”



Nothing could have better captured the intent of the soccer tournament’s organizers than this quote, offered by a young mother in the southern Tajikistan community of Shartuz after watching her son compete in the Shartuz Soccer Tournament. Conducted with assistance from USAID’s Community Action Investment Program (CAIP), implemented by Mercy Corps, the Shartuz Soccer Tournament is just one example of how the program is alleviating social tensions, removing barriers to communication and empowering community members to take a proactive role in shaping the future for generations to come.

The community of Shartuz in southern Tajikistan is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in all of Tajikistan with residents from neighboring Afghanistan, a majority Uzbek population and a sizeable population of Tajiks. A town of over 8,000 people, Shartuz lies just 50 kilometers from the border with Afghanistan and 60 kilometers from the border with Uzbekistan.

When Mercy Corps’ CAIP first began work in Shartuz in August, 2002, the unemployment rate was reported to be as high as 80%; ethnic tension was rising; there was unequal access to social services and a lack of basic infrastructure. In other words, it was a community that exhibited significant potential for conflict and, therefore, fit all the necessary criteria for CAIP. Despite the issues confronting the community of Shartuz, a strong Community Action Group (CAG) was established with the help of Mercy Corps, and several projects were identified and prioritized. Those projects include a garbage collection project, a project to rehabilitate and install transformers and three social projects with an emphasis on youth development. Among those social projects, one in particular exhibited the spirit of community-based planning and captured the essence of what USAID, and its implementing partner Mercy Corps, intended a year ago when the CAIP project was first introduced.

Having identified the lack of extracurricular opportunities for youth in the community as a possible reason for increased drug use and crime among youth, the CAG set about developing a sports tournament which would not only provide an opportunity for youth and



adults to socialize, but would also encourage a healthy form of recreation for youth in the community. Events like the Shartuz Soccer Tournament are precisely the kind of events which are absolutely essential for healthy communities, but which have been lacking since the break-up of the Soviet Union.



Due to the success of previous community projects implemented through CAIP, the Shartuz community knew what they were capable of and rallied around the idea of designing a soccer tournament to unite the community. Over the course of five days, six soccer teams comprised of 70 children from the community of Shartuz, were given the opportunity to display their footwork in front of friends and family during the town's soccer tournament organized by the community's CAG and sponsored by the Mercy Corps CAIP Program through

funds from USAID. All team members were presented with Nike uniforms and shoes, donations which had been acquired by Mercy Corps, and the teams were also presented with soccer balls.

According to Foruk Muhamadiev, a captain for one of the soccer teams: "The soccer competition was great! I especially liked that after the competition was completed we were able to keep the uniforms we were given. We were also given footballs allowing us to play whenever we want- in the past we had made balls out of rags, so these balls are much better."

Parents pointed out that these kinds of events are necessary in order to help their communities recover from the devastating Civil War which ended just a few years ago. This competition provided the opportunity for children and adults, from a variety of backgrounds, to develop relationships and form friendships through sports.